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# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

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LIBRARY SCIENCE  
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## KINGSLEY AMIS REPLIES

Talking Points	73
Slipshod Examiners	75
Figures and Facts	76
Women in Librarianship	78
Letters to the Editor	81
Council Notes	85

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# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

Official Journal of the Association of Assistant Librarians

(Section of the Library Association)

Edited by W. G. Smith, Finsbury Public Libraries

VOL. 49. NO. 5

MAY, 1956

## Talking Points

**Putting Knowledge to Work** was the title of an article in the *Financial Times* of February 7th explaining the work of library and information departments in industrial firms. About 1,500 British firms are estimated to have formed such departments, whereas, before the war, it is doubtful if as many as 200 existed. They vary in staff from one person, perhaps part-time, to as many as 40 in the library of one I.C.I. division (each division has a library of its own); with salaries ranging from about £500 a year to upwards of £2,000.

The purpose of a firm's information officials has been defined as intended to ensure that all relevant, technical, economic and other information is digested and focused, in an imaginative way, on the problems of the directors, executives and research and other workers whom they serve. Briefly, the aim is the right information in the right hands at the right time. This, says the *Financial Times* is the active, as opposed to the more normal "passive," approach of a library and training facilities are inadequate for this purpose.

First professional and Registration Group 2A students would do well to read the article. The L.A. would do well to see if it cannot do something about the lack of training facilities for this work.

**Our Examiners** seem sometimes to go out of their way to make their meaning obscure, and woolly thinking among them seems to be as common as among the students. Papers in English Literature have been particularly at fault, and Mr. Reed does good service elsewhere in this issue by exposing examples in the December examination. Another bad example occurred last summer when the Final English Literature paper (3a(v)) said "Compile an annotated booklist of ten works dealing with literary biography or autobiography published since 1945." There can surely be no doubt that the question as set asks for books *about* biography, i.e., criticisms of biographical works. Many students naturally avoided the question because it is probably true that there have not been ten such books since 1945. We suspect, however, that what the examiners meant to say was "ten literary biographies or autobiographies." The effect of the bad wording was to reduce the choice of questions to candidates.

In the Final General Administration paper last December the examiners asked for a discussion of the problems likely to arise "when a scheme of subject specialisation is implemented." This can also have two interpretations. Does it mean a co-operative scheme between libraries (e.g. the Metropolitan Special Collections) or does it refer to specialisation within a library (e.g. the Tottenham scheme)? Both of these aspects of specialisation have received wide publicity recently, but we wonder if the candidates who discussed only the second one received any marks.

**New York.** Two-and-a-half million dollars was the cost of the new Donnell Branch Library in New York and, in addition, the site was given free by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Part of the new library's public will be the one hundred and fifty thousand people who work in the great Radio City skyscraper. According to the *New Yorker* of January 14th, the new library has a comfortable reading lounge and library, furnished with blond-wood chairs and tables, turquoise and grey carpeting, and brown and white nylon draperies adorned with early printers' marks. Sixty thousand volumes in the adult lending department are supplemented by a youth section and the foreign language centre holding books in 20 languages and staffed by specialists in French, German, Russian and Italian. A union catalogue records all the two-and-a-half million books in New York's eighty branches.

Incidentally, we wonder how long it is since the opening of a British Branch Library gained nearly a whole page of publicity in a periodical as important as the *New Yorker*. Oh, for a public relations officer!

**Our Booby Prize** of the month goes to Sutton and Cheam Borough Council. Advertising in the T.L.S. for a Borough Librarian on grade VII, it invited Fellows to *apply in their own handwriting*. Could it be that Sutton doesn't own a typewriter or a secretary? Such ridiculous conditions are more appropriate to an office boy's post than a Chief Librarian's.

**A Bouquet to Sheffield** for enterprising opportunism in publicity. Within a day or two of the death of author A. A. Milne a neat duplicated select booklist of his works was issued. But what about Sheila Kaye-Smith? Did no Sussex library produce a booklist or even arrange a display of her books to take advantage of the publicity arising from her death?

**Dewey-Dominated Librarians** often make a hash of their publicity by producing booklists in Dewey order. Thus, the front page presents to the average reader a dull collection on religion and philosophy. Mr. Jack Dove, Chief of Hove, is one who sees the error of these ways and begins his booklist with the popular travel and adventure, reserving subjects with less general appeal for the inside pages. No cluttering up with classification numbers here either. We see that Mr. Dove has recently added the H. W. Wilson *Fiction Catalogue* to his reference stock. We hope that it is in fact shelved near the fiction in the lending department, where it is more likely to be used. In some libraries one finds even the A.A.L.'s *Fiction Index* and *Sequels* buried away in reference departments.

**Highland Fling.** "If you are at all fond of a peaceful night's sleep. If you anticipate living to a ripe old age on your superannuation, don't go to Newbattle when the S.L.A. Summer School is in session." We can think of no better recommendation for the Scottish Library Association's Summer School than that quoted above from a report by Sheila White in last October's *Assistant*. This year's fling will again be held at Newbattle Abbey, not far from Edinburgh, and details may be had from J. W. Cockburn, F.L.A., Central Library, Edinburgh. Incidentally, isn't it about time young Scottish Librarians formed a Division of the A.A.L.?

**Music Librarianship** becomes more important as subject departments are set up and gramophone libraries formed in many libraries. A conference last month was the first in this country to be devoted entirely to music librarianship. It was organised by the U.K. branch of the International Association of Music Libraries which is having its first conference this year. Membership would be very useful to any assistant proposing to specialise in music; the Secretary is Walter Stock, Royal Academy of Music, N.W.1.

# “Slipshod Examiners”

D. S. REED

## *Brighton School of Librarianship*

We are all familiar with the post-mortem grouings of examination candidates, and are perhaps inclined to treat them as the jaundiced animadversions of the unsuccessful. May I, therefore, as one fortunate enough to pass Group D, History of English literature, in the December Registration examination, record my conviction that the paper was bad and unfair in that it bore but a tenuous relationship to the terms of the syllabus; was totally unbalanced in coverage and relative difficulty of questions; and was in places slipshod in phrasing.

I propose to quote some of the questions in support of this contention.

1. “Trace the influence of Italian writers upon the work of Geoffrey Chaucer.” I believe this question demands a degree of knowledge outside the terms of the syllabus. I know of Honours graduates in English who have confessed inability to write a half-hour essay on this subject.

2. “Write an account of the literary achievements of either Edmund Spenser or Christopher Marlowe.” There appears to be some ambiguity here. Does the question mean “Describe the works of . . .” or “write an account of the sum of the literary achievement of . . .”? One feels certain that the first was what was intended, and the actual wording is unnecessarily circumlocutory. “Candidates should express themselves clearly, concisely . . .”

4. “Write briefly (about 150 words each) on two of the following: Thomas Hobbes; Jeremy Taylor; William Wycherley.” That such a question should carry equal marks with number one is ludicrous.

5. “In point of time, Defoe, Steele and Addison belong to the very first years of the classical period . . . The moral and social tendencies which they represent enter into the very constitution of classicism. Discuss.” No prizes are offered for giving the source or meaning of this quotation. So far, I have met no two persons who have been able to agree as to the latter. As it stands, it is meaningless.

8. “Without actually constituting a school, these writers (Byron, Shelley and Keats) offer so many points of close resemblance that one cannot but view them together. Discuss.” This question is not quite fair: the relationship between these writers is one of psychology rather than literature.

Of the remaining questions, one was on the novels of either Jane Austen or Scott; one on the “Victorian novel of purpose”; one on the literary importance of Dr. Johnson and his circle; and the last blandly requested the candidate to “Survey the development of British drama from 1900-1939.”

The lack of balance in this paper is evident: there is no effective question on Chaucer or his contemporaries; none on Shakespeare or the Elizabethans (with the exception of Marlowe); none on Milton or Wordsworth. On the other hand, the novel has devoted to it two questions, dealing with successive phases of its development.

Now the examiners, in their wisdom, generally have reasons justifying their choice of questions; nevertheless, apart from the rather passé one about catering for the candidate who has read outside the strict terms of the syllabus, one wonders what can have moved them in this instance to compile such an odd assortment.

I would suggest that all these difficulties of scope and coverage stem from an inability on the part of the examiners finally to make up their

minds whether "History of English literature" implies the historical approach only, or admits of the critical as well. The result is an apparent desire on their part to have their cake and eat it.

Many assistants are dubious about the place of this non-professional subject in the Registration syllabus, and one does hear it suggested that English Literature should follow the English essay in Entrance, thus making room for the admission of Bibliography and Assistance to readers as separate Groups. Certainly, the treatment of English literature in recent Registration examinations has encouraged a sceptical view of its practical value in its present form to the would-be A.L.A.

May one hope that the re-organization of this paper into two periods foreshadows a more reasonable and considered approach to the subject by the examiners?

## Figures and Facts

A. C. BUBB

*Hendon Public Library*

Every five years since 1924 a report has been published on the work of the public libraries in the London and Home Counties Area. First impressions of the latest edition\* are of more of everything—books, readers and money. 16,000,000 stock, 119,000,000 annual issue—think of the date-stamping and shelf-tidying it implies. Or consider the £3,000,000 spent in 1954 by the municipal libraries alone and the heroic battles, in some cases, to get it. It looks a big bustling concern if you forget that it is made up of 113 units, some justified by history rather than logic, and that great disparities exist between the services provided; in fact one borough will not co-operate with its county because of this, and "fears abuse of any arrangement made."

Quite a few interesting facts emerge from the published figures (detailed information is available from Chaucer House), and some are disturbing. Giant totals are all very well, but it is not belittling the value of the information in the Report to point out that the true end-product of public librarianship cannot be expressed statistically; public librarianship is bedevilled by the real or imagined necessity to justify itself by impressive figures which an honest public librarian knows are incapable of giving a qualitative assessment of his work.

Allowing for this, one finds the Report lifting the lid on one or two matters; the important one of staff, for instance. Here, firstly, it is surprising to find that, of 3,871 municipal library personnel employed in 1954, 3,095 were "engaged on professional library work." The rest were "porters, binders, cleaners and other manual workers." This appears to define "professional" so loosely that the term becomes almost meaningless. We are perhaps a little touchy about professional status, but to claim that all public library work other than manual labour is "professional," is going to cut little ice inside or outside librarianship. Too many fully-qualified librarians spend too much time on work demanding the minimum of knowledge and skill, and much public librarianship has never got out of first gear as a result. Hence, quite apart from the question of salaries, it cannot attract staff of high quality.

Another interesting point is that, after deducting 266 temporary staff, the 2,829 municipal "professionals" left included only 1,790 L.A. members; 1,039 were not members. Perhaps they couldn't afford it, perhaps they didn't want to join an organisation so reticent in its public relations, or perhaps they felt no need in their work for the stimulus a professional association should give; no explanation is very reassuring.



A little light may be shed on this situation by the Report's statement that during the five-year period "there has been a 120 per cent. turnover of staff in the urban libraries of the area." In the county libraries the turnover was "double the total staff establishment." The Report does not say where they went or why; presumably the majority were in the lower ranks and we must therefore decide whether we want to make it worth while for such people to stay in public librarianship, or whether we should admit the division that in fact already exists between a relatively stable, qualified, professional staff and a body of ever-changing non-professionals, unlikely to qualify or even to be very interested in librarianship.

One hopes that the former group includes the graduates, who numbered 145 "compared with only 49 five years ago" in municipal libraries—perhaps another "only" before that 145 would be fitting. The counties add another 73. But the Report says nothing more; we do not know what degrees they held or whether any use was made of them. Dare one ask how many were science graduates? Graduates (and suitable non-graduates) would seem fitted to back with specialized assistance to readers the special collections and subject specialization schemes the Report mentions. They might ensure that specialized collections acquired first-rate material published abroad; they already buy automatically third-rate material published in Great Britain.

Municipal libraries staff (the counties are not dealt with so minutely in the Report) received extraordinarily varied treatment. Salary gradings (1954 scales) included Deputies on General Division and A.P.T.I. (one each) and four Branch Librarians on A.P.T.VIII 22 systems worked split duties and seven said it was for staff convenience; we are not told how many have a five-day week. If they studied, staffs found staff library stocks ranging from nil at Hertford to 1200 at Finsbury, Hendon and Kensington, and "set courses of study" for junior assistants at 21 libraries out of 103.

The rich confusion one scents beneath the statistics is justified, or not, by the service the public receives. That service is hardly to be expressed statistically, but the Report does state that "34 (Municipal) libraries claim to have some sort of readers' advisory service." Four were "fully organized," 14 "reasonably well-developed," and 16 were "operating to the best of their ability." Even if a reader may, aided by luck or the underpaid skill and interest of the staff, get valuable assistance from a library with no service, these figures remain singularly unimpressive.

Furthermore, the Report, after noting the difficulty of providing a readers' advisory service, adds "We must be satisfied, for the time being, that some progress is being made." We must not be so easily satisfied. Public librarianship, partly from failure to deliver the goods, partly from failure to advertise those it can deliver, lacks support and intelligent criticism from outside. There is progress, but it is slow and sporadic, and to develop new services and revitalise old ones, the right staff are needed. Half the expenditure of public libraries in the area is on staff: bodies to shift books, brains to use, expound and publicize them. It is not adequate, but even more money would not help if abilities and enthusiasm were wasted by unsuitable organization in individual systems, and in the area as a whole. A Report on five years' work seems to have a natural corollary—a plan for intensive improvement during the next five years.

\*STEWART, J. D., *Editor*. Report on the Public Library System of London and the Home Counties, 1954. 1955. 7s. 6d. Hon. Publications Officer, London and Home Counties Branch, the Library Association, Central Library, Banstead Road, Purley, Surrey.

# Women in Librarianship

MARION WILDEN-HART

IN SOME PROFESSIONS the place of women is still undetermined and very often underrated. We have yet to elect a woman President of the Library Association, and even for the Councils of the L.A. and A.A.L., the number of women who seek election is shamefully low. This can be attributed to many causes—some of woman's own making, and some inherited from the past.

TRADITIONALISM. L. R. McColvin writing in *Library Staffs*, says "If women are admitted, their presence must not be prejudicial to the interests of men. Equally, however, we must protect the interests of those women who genuinely make librarianship their career." This was his view some years back and it is an opinion that is very often expressed or insinuated to-day. Mr. McColvin does go on to say "What we seek, therefore, is equality of opportunity and awards." And there is the crux of the problem. On the face of it women to-day in librarianship have the same opportunity and awards, but closer examination shows this to be not so. How many females have been denied leave of absence to attend a library school in favour of an application from a male? Why is it supposed by a local authority that it costs a man more to keep himself at a school than it does a woman, thus awarding a grant of up to £100 less to a woman than to a man? It has been said that it would be a good thing if librarianship were to become a profession for men and an occupation for women and whilst I am in agreement that it is a poor "occupation" for men and quite adequate for women, the professional side has much to offer to women, and what is more important, women have much to offer to the profession. Even in America, where in 1951 92 per cent. of registered librarians were women, Bryan in *The Public Librarian* admits that a larger proportion of men than women in the administrative groups reach the top and they get there faster. This last is relevant to much criticism of an administrative female librarian. Many of our deputy women librarians and some chiefs in the past have gained their positions through hard slogging and good luck in the one system in which they have worked. And very often the reputation of all women administrators arises from experience of years and not from effort or achievement which should have won these women a senior position. We have had and still have some first rate women librarians up at the top, but they have had to fight to get there against greater odds than many male chiefs, and their most formidable obstacle has been the traditional view that women cannot hold office as well as men.

It is true that many men are preferred for senior positions by committees because their status (married or single) will in no way interfere with their work; in fact, it is often assumed that a married man will settle and that a wife is an asset to a man of position. It is also assumed in too many cases that any female employed in the library is suitable for work with children.



**RECRUITMENT.** Many women entrants to the profession are not interested in librarianship as such, but regard it as a job which seems to hold much promise, opening for them a new world of people and books. Moreover, library work is attractive to a girl with some general education behind her as being a source of culture and a centre of wide general interests. She is unconcerned that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing—and supplying an author or a title when required without knowing anything about the contents of a book, affords satisfaction and a sense of purpose in the work. Indeed, this is perhaps the worst danger into which any recruit can fall; that of regarding routine as an end and of answering enquiries as a means of enhancing her own prestige. She may become library conscious—not for the contents of the books, or the little use made of the library facilities by the public, but conscious of whether the books are perfectly straight on the shelves, whether the borrower's register is up to date, or enough stationery is stamped in the cupboard ready for use. She will in fact become a housekeeper to the library and should she ever rise to being appointed Branch Librarian through her years of service in the one system, she will take as much pride in the appearance of the library as she would of her home. Some of this domesticity is an excellent thing for the profession and many of our library buildings, and the comfort of our staff rooms have been improved by a female hand. S. C. Fairchild in *The Library and its Workers* writes "There should be at least one woman in a responsible position in every large staff where women are employed. There is always a certain amount of housekeeping which is essential for the health and comfort of all."

Generally speaking, women are preferred for clerical work on account of their "greater conscientiousness, patience and accuracy in details." They have a desire to serve and they need (far more than men) personal relationships. Women lose more time on account of sickness and ill-health, and it has been said they are more often late than men, and waste time powdering their noses. They are subject to petty jealousies, more easily upset, and easily demoralized by little things. They need praise more often than men and are easily hurt when they make a mistake. They are more impulsive and emotional than men, but usually possess intuitive sympathy, unselfishness in personal service, and a keen sense of duty. A library is made up of special departments calling for special training, qualifications and abilities, and the public library staff should include persons of many and varied talents. We do not need all qualified people on our staffs. We have room for and need unqualified reliable assistants, and because there is little prospect of promotion in such grades it is unwise and unfair to employ male staff for such posts who are of the right calibre. On the other hand, there are many young girls who take on library work as a stop-gap to marriage, who need work as an outlet, who are willing to work hard and to hold certain responsibilities for a low salary because it suits them and does not demand too much of them in their free time. We need assistants like this, and they are so very much better than a second rate male who has failed at some other job and who seeks librarianship as a last resort. The lack of permanence of young girls in libraries is offset by the number of boys leaving the profession after National Service, and a girl living locally is more likely to stay at one library, since to leave home for a girl often means parental opposition as well as being against her own inclination.

**PROSPECTS.** A girl on leaving school decides (probably unconsciously) whether to establish economic independence (career girl) or whether to concentrate on her prospects of marriage. Most ambitious young women

are aware that men still tend to dislike intellect in women except as a social ornament and that fulfilment in a career may mean unfulfilment in the emotional sphere of marriage. A man generally likes a woman who makes him feel at home, superior and satisfied with himself. Women must be liberated from the belief that the usefulness of their lives depends mainly on whether they find favour with someone else. Few girls go out into the world expecting not to marry and, while this is as it should be, it should not colour a woman's life until the time she is betrothed.

Women often think themselves interesting mainly so far as they are of interest to men. They feel they are valued more as a sex than as a person, and being valued as a type they are likely to behave like a type and are afraid of originality. Being unsure of their own emotions and purpose, they lack confidence and drive. A woman has to exert her influence to be given control and has to show she has initiative before responsibility is given. From a man this is assumed. He is expected to take office, to bear responsibilities, to work things out for himself. Proving her worth is woman's constant battle and aim. Even when she is qualified there is still prejudice and belief that emotion will influence her reason. One is reminded of the man who said, "I don't mind a lady dentist doing the filling, but I must have a man to pull the tooth"! Mr. L. R. McColvin in *Library Staffs*, writes: "If librarianship is to take its just place as a profession, if the librarian is to claim equality of status with other officers, and if he is to represent the needs of the service to committees and councils which are predominantly male, the senior executive and administrative library posts should be held by men." Success of women in the past has been judged by the few who have held administrative senior positions and unfortunately many of these have got there by chance, rather than worth. We have some fine women librarians to-day and they do take an active part in the profession. Yet it is still unusual for a woman to be asked to give a paper at a meeting and seldom is the fairer sex heard at all in the discussion afterwards. This reluctance to take part until asked is an inherent quality in women and should not be misunderstood. With time for reflection and encouragement, a woman can show her originality and worth and her feminine mind and logic can be an excellent complement to that of her male colleague. The ability to hold high offices depends very much on the individual woman. As a sex, few women seem to be able to ride the storms safely and well without damaging their health. The fact that a woman needs encouragement and help even as a chief does not mean that she will not make a success of the job. After all, many of the greatest men in the world have owed much to their wives who gave them comfort in difficulties, and to their secretaries who kept their work in order.

The success of professional women is dependent not only on the attitude of the public whom they serve, but also on the attitude of their male colleagues. Their status, and the status of the profession as a whole will be improved when the division of staff into professional and non-professional categories is accepted and when posts are filled by specialists to suit the work and not by qualified persons to fill the Grade.

## Kingsley Amis Replies

I have read with great interest the recent exchanges in *The Assistant Librarian* about my novel, *That Uncertain Feeling*. May I offer some of my own thoughts on the matter?

One of my purposes, though not a main one, was to give an account of my hero's job with the idea of throwing light on his character and environment. Being the sort of hero he was, this job had to be uncongenial, boring and of doubtful value. I therefore put him in a public library described in a highly selective fashion. I mean by this that I suppressed all the more cheerful details of what I take to be library life, and exaggerated a sufficient number of the more depressing details I had observed during a lifetime of using various libraries in varying states of affluence. This kind of selectiveness, I feel, is a usual procedure of the writer with satiric and/or humorous intentions. To take its result in the same spirit as an objective report is, I should say, to confound fiction with social history, while to take it as somehow representing my own attitude to libraries and librarians seems rather like confounding fiction with autobiography.

One point of Mr. Glencross's I should like to take up. When I was writing my book I was conscious of no feeling of contempt for my characters or "for most aspects of their various ways of life," though admittedly this is no guarantee of the book's freedom from such contempt. But I should just like to suggest that to show people behaving foolishly, hastily, ignobly, absurdly, cruelly and the rest of it is to show them as they do in fact behave a lot of the time, and among "people" I include myself. So Mr. Glencross is right to deny many "intellectual, ethical or cultural superiority" over my characters. It's one of my qualifications for writing about them.

KINGSLEY AMIS.

University College of Swansea.

Mr. Glencross has distinguished company in finding Messrs. Amis and Wain, "the Teddy Boys of contemporary letters," mainly from the older generation. At a recent meeting of the North Midlands Branch of the L.A., Mr. Frank Tilsley told us that the characters Dixon, Lewis, Lumley, etc. were spineless young men whose chief activity was sucking their thumbs and feeling sorry for themselves. It seems to me sheer gall for our elders to make this particular criticism after their record of handling affairs, and, more to the point, quite untrue. Mr. Lewis and his forebears certainly have remarkable noses for detecting the sham, but when they find themselves in impossible situations, the last thing they do is to suck their thumbs and indulge in self pity. They act—and with remarkable in-

tegrity. That the results are often riotously funny is not, I think, incidental: it is implicit in the bounce of these "spineless" young men. In this connection I cannot agree with Miss Walker that the slapstick passages are Amis at his worst.

All in all I think the detractors of Amis and Wain are paying contemporary society a compliment it doesn't deserve. Perhaps our attitude to these novelists is bound up inevitably with our social attitudes. But why they should alarm, of all people, J. B. Priestley, who was scarcely backward in underlining the malaise of earlier years, is quite beyond me.

PETER CHURLEY,

Branch Librarian, Nottingham Public Libraries.

## ERRING TUTORS

A complete failure to perceive the public library as being any more than few things to few men was shown by the tutor who answered the question in your *Examination Comments* on the usefulness of foreign language publications.

He concedes that the university and special libraries need foreign literature as an important contribution to knowledge. Is this reason insufficient for the public librarian to provide the best literature in any subject regardless of language?

If a reader demands foreign literature perhaps we are to borrow from elsewhere as the writer of the comments suggests we should do when providing for foreign communities. If we all rely on borrowing, who will lend?

The present writers would like to know if the examiners expect them to hold the narrow view as expressed in *Examination Comments* that the public library should reply on borrowing to satisfy the more serious readers' needs.

Or are we to regard the public library as serving the community, however diverse its constituents, with the best literature. We should welcome a statement from the senior examiner.\*

U. RAYMOND,

P. BIRTWHISTLE,

} *Final Students,*

J. SMITH, D. BELL,

Y. PITMAN,

} *Leeds Library School.*

\*This and many other subjects discussed in the *Final Examination* are matters of opinion and the examiners are unlikely to lay down a "party line." Students may be assured that any point of view which shows understanding of the problems involved and is well expressed will be accepted.—ED.

In regard to your tutor's comments on the *Final Examination* (March *Assistant*) may I suggest that the volumes in the *Teach Yourself History Series* are not textbooks and that Woodham-Smith's *The Reason Why* is not a general treatise.

Your tutor defines a textbook as a factual treatment. Presumably, in the context, this definition is meant to differentiate textbooks from the other classes listed but, in fact, it does not do so since all the others are also factual treatments. A textbook is a book that presents the essential facts in a straightforward manner for those who have to study the subject in a formal way, usually on an elementary or intermediate level. Grant and Temperley's *Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* would be an example. As to the *Teach Yourself History Series*. I suggest that either your tutor has not read A. L. Rowse's introduction to the series or else he has singularly failed in his aims.

The definition of a general treatise as a "presentation of facts interestingly" is dangerously misleading. The essential point about a treatise is that it should be systematic; a general treatise treats a general subject in a systematic way. Miss Woodham-Smith is concerned not with a general, but with a fairly particular subject, and she does not present it in a systematic way, but in a popular manner calculated to appeal to the layman. Joliffe's *Constitutional History of Mediaeval England* would be a better example of a general treatise. I would ask your tutor to read the first paragraph of *The Reason Why* again.

C. BRADLEY, *Bromley Library.*

*Our Tutor replies:* If Mr. Bradley had included in his definition the words "as preparation for an examination," then I would have agreed that volumes in the *Teach Yourself History Series* are not textbooks; but he does not. A textbook is surely a presentation of accurate facts without bias and perhaps without literary style. Does Mr. Bradley avow that the books in this Series do not present facts or that they give them inaccurately or that they contain bias?

In his last paragraph, Mr. Bradley illustrates once more the certainty of different interpretations being placed on the same phrase by different readers. The *Final Student* when asked to define terms differently interpreted by different authorities should, I hold, show he is aware of this, choose one meaning, and give the reasons for his choice.

## AN ANACHRONISM

I view with suspicion the continued attempt to brand all institutional delegates as reactionaries, often on flimsy evidence. Authority members are not the only scapegoats. Even with their plural votes they only muster 7 per cent. of the voting strength. Yet in the postal ballot on "The public library service and local government reorganization" those misguided enough to vote against the Council's motion numbered 34 per cent.

It is interesting to note that ASLIB has institutional membership, and in the United States the American Library Association, the Special Libraries Association, the Medical Library Association, and the Catholic Library Association, as well as practically all the national associations, make similar provisions. This uniformity in library associations can hardly be the result of chance; it must have a rational explanation. It would seem that in librarianship there is a closer tie between the practitioner and the institution. The doctor can function independently of the hospital; a school is not absolutely necessary for a teacher to teach; a priest is still a priest away from his church; but a librarian without a library is a contradiction in terms.

The public need for better and better library services demands the active co-operation of both librarian and library authority. Further fragmentation, dispersal of effort, and the loss of over £4,000 per year in subscriptions would make even more difficult of attainment the second stated purpose of the Library Association: "To promote the better administration of libraries."

D. J. GROGAN.

*Manchester Reference Library.*

Miss Willson is right. Institutional membership of the L.A. is an anachronism. Eighty years ago it was laudable to try to "unite all persons engaged or interested in library work." But times change, and the L.A. ought to change with them. No longer is there the same urgent need to enlist the formal support of all and any for

the idea of public libraries. The idea has caught on. We have got quantity: now we want quality, too.

The change would make membership more attractive to special and technical librarians. The removal of the incubus of non-librarian members (coached largely by the Association of Municipal Corporations) would show, more than any relegation of public librarians to a Municipal Libraries Section, that the L.A. was a professional organization worth belonging to.

If "librarians only" was the watchword, the Association could begin to give effective advice on members' salaries and conditions of service. It would also be in a position to help in negotiations with employers.

Byelaws, and, if necessary, Royal Charter, must be altered. It might be too much of a wrench to change our title, but at least we should be "The Librarians' Association."

J. V. HOWARD.

*West Ham Public Libraries.*

The anachronism of institutional membership exposed by Miss Willson in the *March Assistant* is more dangerous than may be realised at first sight. If local authorities get around to reading news from overseas they will find a contemporary example of "power politics" in the form of an artificially packed governing body. Our governing body's A.G.M. is wide open to power politics in the shape of 5-guinea memberships available to local authorities which could be used to dictate the business of the meeting, with a large number of librarians refused permission to attend the A.G.M. in working hours by these same authorities. There is nothing to prevent this happening this year.

A petition by only ten members of the L.A. can start a measure of civil defence in seeking deletion of Byelaw A.4. A more aggressive approach—massive retaliation if you like—would be to limit voting powers to Chartered Librarians. This latter step should help, in time, to ensure that librarians



know the rules of their own Association and so save the quick from carrying the dead on their backs at the A.G.M. as well as the rest of their working life.

There is no doubt at all that the library profession needs to present a united front in the attack on its lowly status and shortcomings. The most glaring example of lack of unity is the fiasco over blacklisting. The remedy for Southport, where the inevitable was faced once again with a Canute, and blacklisting, where the many are held to ransom by the few, rests in amending the Byelaws.

For our own good we must move soon and effectively. Miss Willson gives us one target. It is within our power to remove this anachronism. It is necessary to do so. This year's A.G.M. is the place to do it.

L. E. TAYLOR.

*Bilston Public Library.*

## SERVICE WITH A SMILE

Your correspondent in his article, "Non-assistance to Readers" (March *Assistant*) describes how his wife joined her local public library on a Saturday. He is rightly concerned that individual attention was not forthcoming. The answer to the problem is yet to be found, and is also causing grave concern to those library assistants who have to deal with too many people and who must at all costs keep the queues moving. Here are some figures for five service points in a suburb which I believe to be typical.

Issues on a typical Saturday:—

Branch A	B	C	D	E
2,347	1,652	938	587	294

Staff on duty:—

A	B	C	D	E
9	5	3	2	1

In the following table of the number of people for whom tickets were made out, it is estimated that two-thirds are renewing their tickets, and one-third are new readers:—

A	B	C	D	E
31	23	32	27	21

With the exception of 'E' branch, which closes for lunch, they are all

open from 9.30 a.m. to 1 p.m., and 'A' and 'B' have separately staffed departments for children. 'A' also has a full-time reference department.

It will be seen from these figures that with the exception of 'A' there are occasions at lunch and tea-times when only one person is available at each counter. The staff work alternate Saturdays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., with every sixth Saturday off from October to April, staffing permitting. How would your correspondent solve the problem of introducing the new reader to the facilities of the service? We provide an introductory booklet and, I hope, a smile, but an individual introduction is no more possible than individual attention in a class of fifty. If your correspondent cares to investigate the staff situation at the library in question, he may well find that understaffing rather than offhandedness was the cause of the lack of attention, and he can then put his complaint before his own library committee or council.

M. F. LAWRENCE,

*Coulsdon and Purley Public Libraries.*

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# BLACK EQUALS WHITE

Council Notes—8th March

The principal debate of the March meeting centred around the prickly issue of institutional membership of the Library Association. The Greater London Division had a motion applauding L.A.s move towards encouraging institutional representation for special libraries. Miss Willson's views on the subject proved to be otherwise, and not without backing. Some astute whip-cracking by the President led us through a thick and murky procedural jungle, but only to a crossroads without signposts. Council passed the G.L.D. motion, and exhibited their liberality by passing also a motion from Mr. A. C. Jones and Miss Willson instructing the officers to investigate the possibility of abolishing institutional membership or at least limiting the voting rights of institutional representatives, so that librarians might in future have some opportunity of governing their own professional affairs. One voice at least, possibly that of Mr. Carver, indicated that there might be some inconsistency in these two views. The succinct comment which rounded off the debate provides the headline for these notes.

The President opened the meeting with the sad duty of reporting the death of Mr. H. W. Marr, a post-war A.A.L. President. Good humour was restored by Mr. Tynemouth's report of another movement in the orbit of the Moon, and congratulations offered to Miss Binder on her translation to the film colony at Wandsworth.

Posts at inadequate salaries were once more a main feature with reports of L.A. action concerning posts offered at Port Talbot, Crewe, Wellingborough and East Riding County. It was pleasing to hear also that the report in the L.A. Record on the Tynemouth appointment had received some attention from the national press.

The report of the Press and Publications Committee was received without much alteration and Council recorded its gratitude to Mr. Tomlinson for his work as Editor of *Examination Comments* in the *Assistant*.

Not so quietly received was the report of the Education Committee. Miss Willson, seconded by Mr. Bangs, made an impassioned plea for a reaffirmation of the A.A.L.'s policy of providing correspondence courses for all subjects in the L.A. syllabus. This policy was upheld, as also—for the time being—was that of providing correspondence courses to students with or without written work being supplied. The Education Committee had asked the Council to attempt to reverse this A.G.M.-imposed policy, but following a motion from Mr. Thompson, seconded by the Honorary Secretary, it was agreed to defer the matter and invite the views of tutors in the meantime. The week-end display school suggested by last year's conference continues to present problems, and has now been handed over to the Greater London Division to organise.

The report of the Finance Committee also did not pass without comment. Three divisions were rebuked for not sending in their financial statements to the Honorary Treasurer in time for him to assess capitation payments for 1956. Among the defaulters was Wessex, and it was later suggested that perhaps the Divisional Treasurer was supporting Mr. Stebbing (see *March Assistant*) in his attempt to render this Division *terra incognita*. The longest argument was occasioned by the British Council's request to send back on credit 200 copies of Phillips' *Primer of Classification* purchased eight months previously. Discussion of the terms on which they should be allowed to return these copies brought to light unsuspected political affiliations and talk of government sales of surplus paint (which Mr. Surridge capped beautifully by pointing out that we were, after all, talking of a *Primer*).

The President reviewed the current situation regarding the proposed Muni-

pal Libraries Section, and it was agreed that our representatives should continue to attend any meetings held to discuss this matter, but that no commitments should be undertaken until the Library Association memorandum had appeared.

Students from the Ealing Polytechnic had been present as observers up to this time, but they having disappeared at the early hour to which only students are accustomed, the always private and confidential reports of our representatives on the L.A. Council and committees were heard. They did not produce anything momentous. Mr. Bristow was questioned on the kitchen, and said that he assumed that the old gas cooker had been replaced, since he had seen a heap of old iron outside Chaucer House. For his pains he was informed by the Honorary Editor "that's your car."

Finally Mr. New drew the attention of Council to a letter in the February issue of the *Assistant Librarian* on the question of interavailability. It was agreed to take this up with the Library Association.

As Council meetings go, this was a quiet one. Nevertheless, the shortest agenda for over two years still took us through to past five o'clock.

ERIC MOON.

### **Thieves**

A Northern member writes:—

"Because an index volume from the public library at Newark has been stolen, part of the result of 36 years' work has been lost. The staff of 10 will have to go through 35,000 documents to compile a new index."

"DAILY MAIL," 13th December, 1955.

It just shows what can happen even in a library which is not prepared to risk admitting a temporary cleaner!

### **A.A.L. Guide**

#### **First Professional Examination**

We regret that the dispute in the printing trade has caused publication of the new guide to be delayed. It is now expected to be available at the beginning of May. Our apologies to all members who have sent orders, which will be met as soon as possible. Further orders should be sent, with a postal order for 2s. 6d. (3s. 0d. to non-members), to J. S. Davey, 49, Halstead Gardens, London, N.21.

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